

Message Text

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S E C R E T OTTAWA 4579

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGEN, CA

SUBJ: TRUDEAU ON TACTICS VIS-A-VIS THE SEPARATISTS

1. SUMMARY. IN 40-MINUTE TALK TODAY NOVEMBER 17 TRUDEAU TOLD ME HE WILL LET LEVESQUE MAKE THE FIRST MOVE, EXPECTS IT BY MID-DECEMBER. TRUDEAU INSISTS THAT HE HAS NO CONCESSION TO OFFER, AND THUS SEES LEVESQUE GRADUALLY MAKING THE CASE THAT QUEBEC CAN EXPECT NOTHING FROM ENGLISH CANADA. ONLY WAY TO DEAL WITH SEPARATISTS HE DESCRIBED IS TO TRY TO MOVE FOCUS FROM OTTAWA-QUEBEC DUEL TO DECISIONS ON QUEBEC ECONOMY, ON WHICH PQ (PARTI QUEBECOIS) BADLY AT ODDS WITH ITSELF. BUT HE EXPRESSED NO OPTIMISM, AND IS CONCERN THAT EVENTUAL ACCEPTANCE OF IDEA OF SEPARATISM BY AMERICANS COULD HASTEN ITS ACHIEVEMENT.

2. TRUDEAU CEDES THE FIRST MOVE TO LEVESQUE IN THE COMING ENGAGEMENT. LEVESQUE IS NOW RIDING THE TOP OF HIS WAVE, TRUDEAU SAID BENEFITTING FROM A RANGE OF WELL WISHES IN QUEBEC EXTENDING FAR BEYOND HIS SOLID SEPARATIST SUPPORT. TRUDEAU'S OWN SUPPORT, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS SEVERELY ERODED IN QUEBEC AS ELSEWHERE IN CANADA, AND AT THIS STAGE OF PLAY HE CANNOT COUNT ON SPONTANEOUS SYMPATHY FOR AN AGGRESSIVE APPROACH TO THE NEW QUEBEC GOVERNMENT.

3. TRUDEAU EXPECTS LEVESQUE'S FIRST MOVE TO COME SOON. IT WILL BE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR LEVESQUE NOT TO MAKE A STATEMENT AT THE FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE ON PATRIATION

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OF THE CONSTITUTION NOW SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 13, 14 OR 15.

TRUDEAU WILL TRY TO AVOID PUTTING ON THE AGENDA THOSE CONSTITUTIONAL DEMANDS (CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY, GUARANTEES OF PROVINCIAL CONTROL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES) WHICH THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT UNDER BOURASSA HAS BEEN PUTTING FORWARD, AND WHICH OTTAWA HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED. HOWEVER, TRUDEAU EXPECTS THAT EITHER QUEBEC OR ANOTHER PROVINCE WILL REQUEST THEIR INCLUSION, AND HE WILL HAVE TO AGREE. RESULT COULD BE THAT LEVESQUE DOES NO MORE THAN ASK WHAT BOURASSA ASKED FOR, GETS THE SAME TURN-DOWN, AND USES THIS AS A FIRST INCIDENT IN BUILDING THE CASE THAT OTTAWA AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER.

4. TRUDEAU SAID HE DOES NOT SEE HOW HE CAN AVOID THERE BEING A SUCCESSION OF SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS, EACH CAREFULLY CALIBRATED TO AVOID A BREACH, BUT EACH ADDING TO THE GENERAL IMPRESSION OF NON-RESPONSIVENESS BY ENGLISH CANADA. HE HOPES, HOWEVER, TO GIVE AS FEW OPPORTUNITIES AS POSSIBLE FOR SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS, AS FAR BETWEEN AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT THE QUEBEC PUBLIC CAN BE FOCUSED ON THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE -- THE ECONOMY -- ON WHICH THE PQ CAN BE MOST VULNERABLE. AS LONG AS THE PQ CAN FOCUS PLAY ON OTTAWA IT WILL BE RELATIVELY EASY TO KEEP PARTY DISCIPLINE, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT THE PQ SPANS "FROM BOURGEOIS TO MAOIST." BUT IF EVER THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT COULD BE SET UP TO MAKE DECISIONS ON OWNERSHIP OF INDUSTRY AND RESOURCES, SOCIAL BENEFITS, EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER RIGHTS, IT WILL COME UNDER SEVERE INTERNAL TENSION. TRUDEAU NOTED THAT THESE EFFECTS OF TENSION WOULD BE MAGNIFIED BY THE NEED TO COME TO TERMS WITH FOREIGN INVESTORS. HE AGREED THAT INVESTORS SHOULD NOT TAKE ANY PRECIPITATE ACTION EITHER TO PULL OUT OF OR INVEST IN QUEBEC, BUT RATHER SHOULD ADOPT A WAITING STANCE WHILE MAKING CLEAR TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT THAT THEY WISH ASSURANCES ABOUT THEIR FUTURE IN THE PROVINCE.

5. TRUDEAU EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT HOW THE SEPARATIST ISSUE MAY ULTIMATELY PLAY OUT AND THE POSSIBLE ROLE AMERICANS MAY HAVE IN IT. IF THE SEPARATISTS CONTINUE TO GAIN, SOME

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AMERICANS MIGHT COME TO BELIEVE THAT THEY COULD DEAL WITH QUEBEC AND THE SINGLE OR SEVERAL REMAINING PIECES OF CANADA. BUT, TRUDEAU SAID, THERE WOULD BE LITTLE IN THAT FOR THE US. GIVEN EUROPEAN (READ FRENCH) AND POTENTIALLY SOVIET AND CHINESE INTEREST IN QUEBEC, AN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE IN THE PROVINCE COULD OCCUR. A SIMILAR STRUGGLE WOULD GO ON BETWEEN THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT, AND IT COULD NOT

BE EXCLUDED THAT A RADICAL STATE MIGHT APPEAR ON THE ST. LAWRENCE WITH OUTSIDE, HOSTILE SUPPORT. TRUDEAU ADDED THAT HE WOULD NOT WANT TO WAVE A BOGEYMAN BUT THOUGHT THIS POSSIBLE. I POINTED OUT THAT I HAD OFTEN HEARD CANADIANS SPECULATE ON THE REMAINING PIECES ASSOCIATING WITH THE UNITED STATES IN THE EVENT OF SEPARATION, BUT HAD NEVER HEARD AMERICANS SPECULATE UPON IT. TRUDEAU REPLIED THAT MANY CANADIANS DO, AND IF SPECULATING GETS GOING VERY MUCH IT COULD SPREAD TO THE U.S. AND HASTEN THE WHOLE HISTORICAL PROCESS.

6. ONE OF THE GREAT DANGERS FOR CANADA IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, TRUDEAU SAID, IS TO BECOME SO OBSESSED WITH SEPARATISM AS TO FAIL TO DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE TO GET THE ECONOMY MOVING. TRUDEAU IS VERY INTERESTED IN MEETING WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION EARLY ON IN ORDER TO SEE HOW HIS OWN ACTION TO IMPROVE ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE CAN BE COORDINATED WITH THAT OF THE UNITED STATES.

7. COMMENT: IN MY JUDGMENT TRUDEAU'S COMMENTS ABOVE SHOULD NOT RPT NOT BE TAKEN AS FINAL TACTICAL DECISIONS. TAKEN BY SURPRISE, HIS GOVERNMENT IS STILL DEBATING HOW TO DEAL WITH THE SEPARATIST VICTORY; IT CANNOT BE RULED OUT THAT IT WILL TAKE SOME INITIATIVE. MORE IMPORTANT, IT IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR THAT TRUDEAU HAS THE STRENGTH TO STONEWALL LEVESQUE THE WAY HE STONEWALLED BOURASSA. THE OPPOSITION PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES AND RIVAL JOH TURNER WITHIN THE LIBERAL PARTY MAY BOTH ADVOCATE SUCH CONCESSIONS, AS WILL SOME OF THE WESTERN PROVINCES TO KEEP QUEBEC IN FEDERATION. WE CAN EXPECT A DEBATE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT ON CENTRALISM VS A LOOSER CONFEDERATION. IF TRUDEAU DOES STICK TO HIS PRESENT COURSE OF NO CONCESSIONS, THE OTTAWA/

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QUEBEC CLASH MAY ESCALATE QUITE QUICKLY.

8. TRUDEAU DISPLAYED NO OPTIMISM: HE MADE NO EFFORT (AS HAVE OTHERS) TO DESCRIBE FOR ME A SCENARIO IN WHICH EVERYTHING COMES OUT ALL RIGHT. WHILE THERE ARE "SOME FOOLS ON THEIR SIDE TOO," HE DESCRIBED LEVESQUE AS A "FORMIDABLE, TOTALLY COMMITTED ADVERSARY."

ENDERS

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